THE YEAR *HE* STAYED HOME

DIRECTOR DAVID GORDON GREEN TALKS ABOUT DELAYS, THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HORROR AND COMEDY, AND THE MAYHEM THAT'S ABOUT TO ENSUE IN *HALLOWEEN KILLS*.

BY JOSEPH LUSTER

S lasher movies have a few rules inherent to their design, and each of the films within the genre tends to establish its own unique traditions. There is plenty of tradition that make *Halloween* villain Michael Myers who, or what, he is, and one of the staples of the long-running franchise that John Carpenter established way back in 1978 is the fact that each new movie opens on or around Halloween. Some of them have been a month or so off, and Rob Zombie's pair both hit in the heat of summer—oddly fitting for Zombie's filmmaking style—but most fall somewhere near *All Hallows' Eve*. That's one of many reasons it was such a disappointment for fans and those involved to see the latest entry—*Halloween Kills*, which follows up Blumhouse and director David Gordon Green's first crack at one of the most iconic horror characters of all time—move out of 2020.

This was no big surprise considering what a shitshow of a year 2020 ended up being. While the pandemic may have proven to be one of Myers' only known weaknesses, it merely postponed the inevitable. Like any good horror icon, you can't keep Michael Myers down for long, and exactly one year later we're staring right down the barrel of *Kills*, and the folks involved couldn't be more excited for everyone to see what happens when the entire town of Haddonfield gets a crack at taking on this unstoppable force of evil.

BLOOD BEATS

Out of all the people involved, it should come as no surprise that director David Gordon Green (*Pineapple Express, Your Highness*) is among the most excited

DIRECTOR DAVID GORDON GREEN (L) AND THE ORIGINAL ACTOR BEHIND THE MASK, NICK CASTLE.

to finally get *Kills* out on the big screen. Green started out on dramas before moving on to direct comedies for the big and small screen, but as we've seen with everything from *Eastbound & Down* to 2018's *Halloween* and beyond, the line between genres is blurry by design in the most capable hands.

"I think horror and comedy have a lot in common," Green said the first time I spoke with him, before the delay was announced. "There's a balance between absurdity and melancholy, which I really enjoy. You obviously lean one way in horror, but I mean you can't say it's not absurd how many times this motherfucker keeps getting back up from the dead. Comedy's like that, too."

The big difference that separates both genres from drama, then, really comes down to engineering. "If you don't know what the geography of the house is and you haven't planted certain objects, who gives a shit at the end because everything would just be a surprise and it's just chaos," Green said. "But when everything is laid out in a way—information from characters to weapons to what's around the corner—it makes for a great jump scare as equally as it makes for

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EVERY STORY HAS A BEGINNING. THIS ONE JUST HAPPENS TO BE ON FIRE.

ANTHONY MICHAEL HALL IS HERE FOR REVENGE AS TOMMY DOYLE IN *HALLOWEEN KILLS.*

JUDY GREER AS KAREN.

OMAR DORSEY AS SHERIFF BARKER.

a great laugh. The structural engineering of that is very different than in dramatic works, for me at least, as a dramatic writer. When I'm working on dramatic movies it can flow a little more naturalistically, a little more organically, but in comedy and horror I feel like everything has a consideration. Where you put the camera, what you've seen of the room, what that character has in their pockets. Because if the audience knows all this information it adds up to a reaction, to a crowd response of fear, tension, anxiety; here comes the joke. Sometimes when you know the joke's coming it's funnier than if it jumps right out randomly and surprises you. It all kind of works within similar engineering."

Green admits he doesn't always have the mind for those engineering aspects of putting together a perfectly crafted horror scene. That's where writer and producer Danny McBride comes into play. According to the director, McBride has that engineer's mind, whereas Green's is more atmospheric. McBride came up with a lot of those "big plot moves that are really great," which comes from exercising that ability after so many years of comedy.

There's certainly intentional comedy peppered throughout Green's first *Halloween* outing, but he didn't feel the need to lean on that to break up the tension in the follow-up. "The last movie had actual comedy in it, where this one doesn't," he explained. "And I think when you see the kind of operatic nature of some of the violence in it, it's going to be its own sense of fun. So, you didn't need a kid saying bad words in this movie. You didn't need some of the things I felt helped the levity, the little moments of comic relief and charms our last movie had … this doesn't really have that, per se. I thought the violence kind of took care of that piece of popcorn."

Throughout everything, David Gordon Green and everyone else involved echoed the camaraderie on set and the non-stop spirit of fun in the air while shooting *Halloween Kills*. Green knows that to make any of this work, you actually have to like what you're doing and enjoy the job at hand. "You should have to check a box on your job application to direct," he said. "Are you gonna have fun, or are you gonna be an asshole?"

SHELVING THE SHAPE

When it comes to whether or not Green found it difficult to decide to delay the premiere of this particular slaughter-ama, he sums it up succinctly. "It felt correct," Green began. "It was just such a confusing time as to how you could actually get the most people to watch your movie, and this being a seasonal horror film it felt important to be on Halloween. So, it wasn't really much of a question to me. I didn't want to put it on streaming, and I didn't want to release it in the spring or something. Once it looked like theaters weren't going to be open in the fall of last year, it was a pretty quick, easy decision."

Even when you aren't counting on a very specific seasonal launch, Green and the folks at Blumhouse are proof that delays aren't necessarily a bad thing. "In a good way it gave me a lot of time to work on the script for the third movie, so that's cool," Green reflected. "And the movie hasn't changed a frame since we shut down, so outside of the fact that a year is a long time to put a movie on the shelf, it wasn't really a bad experience. I got a lot of writing done, a lot of reflection, a lot of strategizing with the team. And brewed up a lot of other ideas with Blumhouse of other movies to make, so we made the most out of the downtime for sure."

Beyond prepping ideas with Blumhouse for future projects, Green spent a lot of lockdown directing remotely and in person, from commercials to full-on TV show pilots. "Oh man, since we last talked, I've probably directed a hundred days of things," he said. "Early in the summer I was doing remote commercials, and then I started doing real commercials, and then I did a TV pilot in LA in January, which was wild, because that was like in the height of everything. It was over at Warner Bros., and it was like a military medical operation to go to set every day, it was really interesting. Then in March we started filming the second season of *Righteous Gemstones* here, and now I just went up to Poughkeepsie to finish up some exteriors on that pilot I did, and now we're back here [in Charleston]."

"I've experienced every version of the COVID protocols, and they're all different. Everyone has their own anxieties and neuroses, or they don't give a shit, or they do. It's been so interesting to bounce from New York to South Carolina to Califor-

nia to … actually, some of that pilot I had to direct remotely, because I had a close contact with a camera assistant that got COVID, so I had to direct from my living room for a few days. That was fun."

When theaters started to open back up, so did the hype for *Halloween Kills*, which had a new trailer released early in the summer. To some, the trailer appeared to be loaded with spoilers, but Green and his team aren't worried about ruining anything for their second film. "When we were watching early cuts of the trailer, I was like 'There's a lot of kills in this trailer,' and the studio was like, 'Yeah, but there's a lot more in the movie,'" he laughed. "They kind of had a good argument. It's always a juggling act when you're putting these things together, right? Because you want to show enough that you get people excited, but you don't want to give away the twists and turns that happen in the movie. We've avoided any twists of any monumental stake, and you get a sense of the mayhem. I was watching it when we put it together a couple weeks ago and I did get a kick out of it, thinking, 'Yep, well, if you don't like this trailer, you probably wouldn't like the movie.' If it gets people excited, the movie is a lot more of that."

While the third movie, *Halloween Ends*, had already been written, the downtime did give David Gordon Green an opportunity to tool around with it a little. "It just gave me time to tinker," he said. "The first two movies take place on one night, and this one takes place in the present. So it's interesting to have a new version of the present in some way. And to think, okay, that was the only real dramatic thing is, I'm going to add a year, and there were some effects of that. It's hard to talk about that without getting too into it, but …"

Alright, we'll leave it at that, then. The nice thing about classic slashers like *Halloween* is you can know as much or as little about them as you want in advance; it all ultimately comes down to the experience. Whether you're in a packed room of screaming theatergoers or embedded in your couch alone with all the lights off, Michael Myers is still there at the end of the day. On the screen. In your dreams. Waiting to rise from the ashes just one more time.

Halloween Kills **slashes its way into theaters on October 15, 2021.**

A TALE OF TWO MICHAEL MYERS: NICK CASTLE (L) AND JAMES JUDE COURTNEY